

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 95.

NOVEMBER, 1954

PRICE 1s.6d



A typical illustration from "BLACK BESS" or "THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD" of over 2,000 pages.

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NOVEMBER, 1954

Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, YORK.

From the Editor's Chair

THE GREAT COLLECTOR CALLS AGAIN: For the fourth month in succession it is my melancholy duty to report the passing of a member from our little world, on this occasion Joseph Parks of 2 Irwin Avenue, Saltburn-by-Sea, who passed away in September. Rather strangely, I first heard the news via Canada from Bill Gander, for owing to a long illness Joe had been somewhat out of touch with most of us for a considerable time. He was aged 62.

Joe was known to many members of the clan as the editor and publisher of *Vanity Fair* which ran for many years and was devoted to various kinds of collecting; old boys' books, coins, cigarette cards, match box labels, etc. Later, the title was changed to "The Collectors' Miscellany" which, of late years, was concerned with our own particular hobby only. Not long ago, to our regret, it ceased publication, and at the same time Joe sold the greater part of his collection.

Joe found in John Medcraft a great help in the running of his magazines. Now both have gone. My heartfelt wish is that it will be many a long day before we have another loss in our ranks.

MY LONDON TRIP: In my report last month I, through a strange slip, omitted to mention the enjoyable hour or two I spent with Jim Swan of Paddington. He gave me a typical Londoner's welcome and I can't think how I managed to overlook it in my report: Sorry, Jim.

* * * * *

Next month I hope to tell the story of a collection. I think it will appeal to you and perhaps tug a little at your heart strings.

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JUST A FEW WEEKS NOW: All articles for our eighth Annual are now in hand. I am hoping to squeeze in my "Britain Invaded - Often" which had to be held over last year. I do want to get it in this time, particularly as poor Peard Sutherland helped in the compiling of it.

It is getting imperative now that all orders should be in and quite a number of regulars have not yet ordered. I feel sure I can count on them but I should feel easier in mind if they would give me the okay. I don't want anyone to be left out, on the other hand I naturally don't want to over order.

Each succeeding year the circulation has increased. I am hoping it will happen again this year.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

MY COLLECTION - No. 7.

By J.R. SWAN

To sit down and write of my collection was a bit of a problem as I have had, I should think, two or three of them since I purchased or rather my parents did - a big bound vol. of The Scout for 1921. This was a Xmas present way back in 1925 when I was 9 years old. I had of course, other books before this. Such as Playbox Annuals, Tiger Tim, Rainbow, Bubbles and the like. But this great red vol. - and it did look big to a little lad of tender years! - was the first bound copy I ever had of a year's weekly issues of a boys paper.

So as not to appear too long-winded - and I've got a heck of a lot to say - and our esteemed Editor has other articles to put in the C.D. - I'd better skip a few years! Anyway I can see him licking his blue pencil right now!

Between 1925-28 my reading deviated between Comics (the British kind) and the Thomson Papers. The Wizard and Rover were my favourites - and as they were bought for me so I read them and stored them away - much to my mother's disgust! The Comics, if my fellow collectors are interested - it will perhaps bring back memories - were, The Rainbow, Playbox, Bubbles, Tiger Tim, Sunbeam. This may seem a lot - but remember with a 6d or 1/- you could buy 6 or 12, 1d comics - 3 or 6, 2d issues.

Between 1928 to the fateful 1940 my taste in books altered - to a certain extent anyway! I started to read The Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee, Boys Magazine during 1928 and kept these up regularly week by week till they finished. These papers I stored away as I read them.

My collection of comics by the way, was disposed of. My parents remarked that they were not prepared to have their rooms looking like second-hand bookshops - so out the comics had to go! I'm afraid I did not have much to say about the matter!

I may point out that during this 12 year period (1928-40) I bought other papers such as the Union Jack, Champion, and Popular, but strangely enough I could not get interested in these quite so much as the others - so I just bought them now and again when I had run out of other reading material. But when the Detective Weekly started I took to this and kept the copies till the end. During all this time, however, I kept up The Wizard, Rover, Skipper and Boys Magazine. Also when the Bullseye came out and the Startler I took these in till the last issues. As I had started to earn my own living now in 1931 I could now buy some of the mags. out of my small amount of pocket money.

I certainly had the Collectors bug in me in that 12 years! For I was for ever rummaging through second hand book stalls and shops - I remember well buying a vol. Chums for 1894 for 4d! And getting boys mags. 3 for 2d at the local Ex-Service Man's Market. So I come to 1940 and one sad Saturday morning when going into my newsagents who had served me till then with any amount of books during the previous 15 years - said, "Sorry - no Magnet - they have stopped printing them!" The Boys' Paper Slaughter had started!

Well, around 1942-43 I disposed of my collection to the late Mr. Medcraft and it was quite a lot! Nearly 12 years of Magnets and Gems, about 5 years of Nelson Lees, odd Rob Roy Libraries and Robin Hoods, Detective Weeklies, the lot! Why did I get rid of them? It puzzles me now! Perhaps it was the uncertainty of the war at the time. You know - here today - cop a packet tomorrow - so you get some quick money - and have a time with it while you could.

So all I had left after this was a bookcase full of bound vols. of Chums, B.O.Ps., Scouts, Chatterbox, Young England and the Captain. But after the end of the war and on seeing ad's in

the Exchange & Mart from fellow collectors requiring these types of books I did what I thought was a good turn - and disposed of the vols. to whoever required them. And believe me! I had plenty of correspondence to deal with! After a few years had past I had the yearning to start up another collection - I wanted to see the Magnet, Gem, N.L. and the other old papers again. So with the help I've had during the last four or five years from our good friend Bill Martin and not forgetting Tom Lambert, Ronald Rouse, Tom Hopperton, Bill Lofts and George Highton - whether their help was small or large - I have managed to accumulate over 300 Magnets. Nearly the complete run of 1st & 2nd Gems, Vanguard, bound copy of Varney the Vampyre (21 numbers). Odd issues, Empire Library (with a signed letter from Frank Richards attached!) Schoolboys Owns, Chums, Scouts, around 200 Sexton Blake Libs. (3rd series), 300 Champions 1943-52. And have been taking each month the A.P. monthly books and have all the nos. from No. 1. These are all the 8d issues of Cowboy Comics, Western Library, Thriller Lib., Detective Lib. So with the S.B.L's. that's 10 issues a month I add to my collection - not forgetting a five year run of Wizards - this is still my favourite Thomson paper - and I don't care who knows it! Last of all but not the least - a steady growing pile of C.Ds. with three C.D. Annuals as well. It is, I may say, a good job I have an understanding wife - as a matter of fact if I'm a bit short of the ready and I wish to buy a certain item she will help me! So I make it my duty to keep my collection of books in a tidy and presentable condition - so they do not get in her way while cleaning house! The beauty of our hobby is that you never seem to get tired of it - anyway I don't! And the books do not eat anything! For I am still looking around to add to my collection which fluctuates according to my whims and fancies and heart cries from other collectors!

SALE: EXCHANGE AND WANTED! Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, S.O.L., Marvels, Holiday Annuals, Bunter Books, etc. (S.A.E. List).
F. BOTTOMLEY, 48 DOWNHILLS PARK ROAD, LONDON, N.17.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Library (first and second series only). Your price paid for good copies. Serial numbers and series to:-

JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WANTED: "Cavendish Abbey" Series in Magnet in good condition.

BASIL ADAM, 28 DERWENT STREET, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE, 5.

WANTED: Original Aldine Robin Hoods and Jack Sheppards. Will pay cash or exchange Aldines. E.R. LANDY, 4 NUNEATON RD. DAGENHAM, ESSEX.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by Josephine Packman

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

In this issue you will read of Bill Lofts meeting with Walter Webb. Bill tells me he could have said a lot more, but he is afraid of embarrassing Walter.

Appropriately enough, next month's Blakiana will contain the first part of a new article by Walter entitled SEXTON BLAKE ON THE FILMS. To my mind this is one of the best articles he has written - and that is saying a lot!

This issue contains the second of Herbert Leckenby's articles. I am quite sure you will all agree that 'Before Tinker's Time' is most interesting.

In regard to the current S.B.L. reviews, to be quite candid I do not think the last four issues worth commenting upon. Were it not for sentimental reasons and the one or two good stories that are written in the course of a year, I would not continue to buy them. However, there is always the possibility of the 'odd' good one coming along, in which case I shall be only too pleased to give it a write up.

Finally, I am very happy to say that at long last Norton Price has completed his set of S.B.L.'s from No. 1 (1st series) to date. It is regrettable that it had to be through the death of a collector that Norton was able to obtain the only one number he needed, but if the late Harry Stables knew (and maybe he does) I am quite sure he would be pleased. Congratulations, Norton!

JOSEPHINE PACKMAN.

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BEFORE TINKER'S TIME

By HERBERT LECKENBY

In the long ago, on February 16th, 1901, to be precise, there started in the 1st Union Jack No. 356, a serial entitled "Griff, the Man Tracker" or "The Exploits of Sexton Blake, Detective". Its author was given as Christopher Stevens. It ran until No. 373, June 15th and in between Sexton Blake had a very exciting time and very often was near unto death. I do not possess the first instalment but in the synopsis to the second one the reader was told:

"A gang of notorious criminals, among whom are Ben the Welsher, Big Burke, Black Peter, and Flash Charlie, conspire to

secure a chest containing a treasure of fabulous value belonging to Valentine Viderque of Lavender Terrace, St. John's Wood. Mr. Viderque is an eccentric old man; he distrusts banks and safe deposits, and keeps the treasure in his own home. At last, however, after many attempts have been made to break into the house, Viderque promises the police that he will remove the treasure to his bank. Black Peter, masquerading as a chestnut merchant, gets wind of this and telegraphs the news to Flash Charlie, who carries the news to the meeting place of the gang, a den known as "The Welsher's Crib" in the Ratcliff Highway. In the Crib at the time is Sexton Blake, detective, cunningly disguised as Old Betty, a water-cress seller. To the astonishment of all, including Sexton Blake himself, the door keeper of the crib announces that Sexton Blake, the great "lagger" is outside demanding admission. All the ruffians present vow that the detective shall not leave the place alive. The door keeper is ordered to admit the visitor."

Well it would appear from that that the story got away to a good start and that there was quite a lot of impersonating and coincidence about. It was the latter where the second Sexton Blake was concerned, for as the story developed it seemed he was an out of work clerk who was in quest of a sixpenny night's lodging, and was actually Sexton Blake's double. The "long arm" with a vengeance.

The members of the gang however refused to believe him and are out for his blood. Then the real Blake acts. We read:

"Wretched looking "Old Betty" had gone, vanished into thin air! Her ragged head-covering, her threadbare jacket and black skirt littered the floor. In her place stood Sexton Blake, looking startlingly like the needy clerk in face and form. The only perceptible difference between the two was that which dire poverty and anxiety will create.

"Big Burke" rang out Blake's voice, fearless and clarion-like in its tones, "put up that knife! I didn't mean to reveal myself, but I can't let an innocent man be murdered in my name! There is but one Sexton Blake. I am he. Let that young man go!"

There followed a real rough house. Eventually, after a terrific fight Blake and his double are overpowered and the place is set alight.

"Ho, ho!" loudly chuckled Big Burke. "Grand news for our chief! Sexton Blake number one an' Sexton Blake number two both

done to death! A job as the chief'll plank down heaps o'quids for too! Carn't tell which is which, carn't we? Well, this fire won't make no mistakes! Ha, ha! It'll burn 'em both to cinders, without fear or favour!"

Then came Griff. I don't know how he was described in the opening instalment but in the picture heading of those which follow his head and shoulders are shown, portraying him wearing a bowler hat, a heavy overcoat buttoned up to the chin and with a cloth covering the lower part of his face. And one gathers here and there from the story that he was a kind of combination of Tinker and Pedro, the two faithful assistants who were then still unborn. He was not so handsome as the lad but just as loyal to his master: he had all the instincts of the bloodhound, and some abilities possessed by neither. We meet him outside the house in which his master is imprisoned.

"Griff, the Man Tracker, haunted the entrance to the Welsher's Crib. Anxiously the man - if man he was - awaited the reappearance of its master. As time passed he grew impatient, troubled... an outbuilding in the rear was seen to be ablaze. The flames spread with wonderful rapidity, and over the hiss of the flames and the crackle of the burning timbers could be heard an agonising, half muffled cry of "Help!"

"Griff's great ears seemed to prick up like those of a faithful hound. He listened for a repetition of the cry, and then, as the appealing wail rang out again the Man Tracker acted in a manner that filled the bystanders with an almost superstitious dread. Using both legs and arms with marvellous agility, Griff swung his huge body up the side of an intervening house, almost as easily as if he were walking on the level ground. With only the grip afforded by a stack-pipe to help him the Man-Tracker reached the roof of the house, scrambled over it to the further side, wrenched up a trap-door in the roof of the Welsher's stable, and in another moment stood amid the blinding smoke that ascended in dense volumes from the raging fire below. "Griff, Griff! Thank Heaven, it's Griff!" moaned Sexton Blake. And at the sound of that well-loved voice the Man-Tracker darted to the great detective's side. "Gur-r-h! gur-r-r-h." That strange guttural grunt was apparently the Man-Tracker's only mode of vocal expression."

Well, needless to say Griff rescued the two prisoners, and the story went on to tell of more and more exciting adventures.

I have not space to tell a tithe of them for my purpose is just to place on record some account of the strange assistant who came fleetingly into the Sexton Blake saga. Later on the reader was told:

"Blake's weird companion expressed delight in its curious yet wonderfully expressive way, placing its face affectionately against the man, who gently patted the hair-covered cheeks. Suddenly the master changed his caressing words and manner. "Where's your respirator, sir?" he commenced sternly. "This terrible fog means death to one such as yourself, Griff, unless unusually strong like you are, and even then most carefully guarded against England's severe climatic changes. I can't afford to lose you, you careless scamp! after all the time I have devoted to your training. Griff, the mysterious detective, is worth his weight in gold - indeed he's worth his weight in diamonds....."

The demonstrations of affectionate greeting over the Man-Tracker had suddenly drawn himself upright and undergone a startling change. Then it was that Griff's owner detected a greatly disordered aspect in the garments of his remarkable charge - mouth covering and blue spectacles removed, clothing all awry, and gloves and boots covered with mire.

Later still this:

"Ha, ha! No bloodhound in existence can match my most faithful and gifted partner. On the track, good fellow. Strike the scent and follow it."

I wonder if Sexton Blake changed his mind about that when Pedro came along some years later.

So far as I am aware when this particular story came to an end, with all the criminals receiving their just deserts, Griff the Man-Tracker passed into oblivion and Blake lost a valuable ally. Christopher Stevens had evidently a flair for the bizarre as had Gwyn Evans of a later day. He had not the classic style of a Hamilton Teed but his Griff, the Man-Tracker was more akin to a Sexton Blake story than the yarns that bear his name today.

* * * * *

I MET WALTER WEBB

One of my greatest pleasures when travelling all over the country is meeting fellow collectors, and it was with much interest that I looked forward to seeing Walter Webb whilst in Birmingham

recently.

We have of course much in common, both being stout devotees of Blake lore; but in addition to this I have always been deeply interested in his articles which have appeared in Blakiana, and have often wondered from where he obtains all his information.

In his early 'forties Walter is a tall, dark man with twinkling eyes. I know he won't mind my saying so, but he looks for all the world like Sexton Blake.

Strangely enough, I am the first collector he has seen, due no doubt to his irregular business hours.

We talked for several hours, discussing the many authors, their pen-names etc., and Blake stories right back to the days of Harry Blythe and the 1st Marvel.

Walter has a very large collection of S.B. Libraries and Union Jacks (both 1st and 2nd series), his favourite authors being G.H. Teed and Allan Blair.

Walter has corresponded with quite a number of Blake authors over a period of years, hence his facts and figures always being so accurate. Not only is he knowledgeable, but a most interesting conversationalist to go with it.

When the time came to say goodbye I was indeed very sorry, and I am quite sure that if in the future any other collector has the pleasure of meeting him, they will agree that Walter Webb is the foremost Authority on Blake lore.

W.O.G. Lofts.

FOR SALE: Nelson Lees 1st new series also a few original smalls. S.A.E. for list please. CYRIL BANKS, 42 ROSE TERRACE, CAITON ST., HUDDERSFIELD.

WANTED: Magnet and Gem Christmas numbers or Christmas school stories in S.O.L W. DARWIN, 72 WESTERN ROAD, EAST DENE, ROTHERHAM, YORKS.

WANTED: Holiday Annuals for 1931, 1933, 1934, 1936 and 1937. In good condition. J. CORBETT, 49 GLYN FARM RD., QUINTON, BIRMINGHAM, 32.

WANTED: ANY copies of Chips between years 1914 and 1920 (inclusive) good condition only. 2/6d each offered. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, S.E.22.

WANTED: Stories by Jack North, Richard Randolph, Randolph Ryle. Particularly School, Cricket and Football yarns. BROSTER, PRIMROSE COTTAGE, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE.

ADVERTISE IN THE C.D. - 1d per word.

HAMILTONIAN

Compiled by HERBERT LECFENBY

The other day I was browsing over a batch of letters written to me during the war, among them a number by John R. Shaw, all so interesting to read again. With one, John had written out an article on Frank Richards and his activities which had appeared in the "Daily Mirror" as long ago as 15th February, 1937. Until I saw it again I had forgotten that articles like it had appeared in newspapers before the last war. Anyway I thought it would be well worthwhile reproducing it in our columns. I put the suggestion to John. He agreed, what's more he kindly sent me the original article. With it there was a picture of a youngish, black-haired, pipe-smoking Frank Richards. We can't reproduce this but here's the article just as it appeared over seventeen years ago. You'll observe that even then the history of the "Magnet" was considered amazing.

Men Behind the "Next Instalment" - 1

IN 20 YEARS OF "THRILLER," BILLY BUNTER'S CREATOR
TYPES 25,000 WORDS A WEEK. - By a Special Correspondent

Words...words...words...millions and millions pouring into the magazine printing presses every week to satisfy the hundreds of thousands of readers, young and old, who can scarcely wait for this week's "thrilling instalment." Have you ever thought of the men who supply this need? Of the days and days of ceaseless toil necessary before Sexton Blake can bring another criminal to heel, or Billy Bunter satisfy his hunger at Greyfriars School?

For twenty years Billy Bunter has been in the Remove. So have his chums, Harry Wharton and Co. Even the inscrutable Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, I see, is not yet in the Sixth.

There must be millions of readers who have affectionate memories of the Famous Five. Every week there are high jinks at Greyfriars: and one man is responsible for them all.

Frank Richards, in spite of a following that a best-selling novelist would envy, remains incurably modest. At his home, in Broadstairs he types out on his own machine 25,000 words of Greyfriars adventures every week, posts them to the "Magnet," and starts on the next 25,000.

This he has done for over twenty years, and thinks nothing of it.

CAN'T EXPEL BILLY: "I started writing when I was seven," he told me. "Mostly pirate stories. Sold my first story when I was seventeen.

"I've changed the characters at Greyfriars over and over again, but of course the originals, like Billy Bunter, have had to remain there all the time. I've tried to expel him once or twice, but he never goes.

"The boys themselves have naturally grown more modern, even though they've never gone up a class.

"As for plots, I've never had the slightest difficulty yet in getting these boys into trouble: and they themselves seem to have a genius for getting out of it."

NOW FOR NEXT THRILL: In their own ageless way these schoolboys are always up to date. Last week, for instance, they started a sit-down strike, which looks like having dire consequences, as I see it means that young Bunter can't get at the tuck shop.

Kipling, in "Stalky and Co.," immortalised one group of schoolboys: but the boys at Greyfriars have probably endeared themselves to a greater and more affectionate public than has ever happened to schoolboys before.

Their invincible impudence is as powerful today as ever it was. In fact I am genuinely sorry for the new head, Mr. Hacker.

* * * * *

And now to the present for once again Bunter & Co. have been very much in the headlines. The following will, I guarantee, bring a chuckle, will have done to those who had already seen it, and at the same time a feeling of sympathy for one who was evidently a Bunter fan.

BILLY BUNTER BOBS UP IN THE DIVORCE COURT

Last month I told how William George had been named at a meeting of the learned British Association: now, believe it or not he has been partly responsible for a husband and wife finding themselves in the Divorce Court! Whatever will the Owl of Greyfriars be up to next, I wonder. Anyway it happened thus, as reported in the morning papers of October 12th.

Robert Scott of Redhill, Surrey, described as "a peaceable sort of man" was trying to watch Bunter on T.V. but his wife, Jean,

evidently no Greyfriars fan, deliberately put her feet up on the mantelpiece (hardly a ladylike attitude) to obscure his view. He complained and she took her feet away (possibly because she found the attitude uncomfortable rather than to obey him). Then she held first a paper and later some knitting in front of the screen, according to Mr. Justice Wallington. Then the quiet little man for one lost his temper, and for the first and only time in his life he struck his wife.

Ha! p'raps he shouldn't, but as I write I have in my mind's eye a few Bunter fans of my acquaintance who would also have been roused to wrath if their wives had dared to act that way.

Anyway, the much tried little man seemed to have the sympathy of the judge for he got his decree, though of course there were other reasons why he became haggard, drawn and aged, besides the Bunter incident.

The "Daily Mirror" told the story under an enormous heading, "She Didn't Let Him Watch Billy Bunter."

All Greyfriars fans will feel a surge of sympathy for Mr. Scott, including myself, still when I saw it I couldn't help saying to myself, just in the manner of a cold-blooded editor, "My word! here's some jolly good copy for Hamiltoniana!"

—oOo—

There has been quite a flood of 'Junior Editions' by the national newspapers lately and some of the provincial ones are following suit. One is the 'Liverpool Echo' for it is giving weekly four large papers for the benefit of the younger members of the family. And they are running one of the Bunter books, "Billy Bunter's Beanfeast" as a serial, with an illustration. Bunter's features also adorn the title page as an ear-piece.

A real score this for Merseyside. I'll bet some of the fathers are reading it.

And the Nottingham Evening Post has been running a correspondence on worthwhile reading. Two letters have appeared signed "Bob Cherry" and "Tom Merry". Here they are. Peter Walker who kindly sent me the cuttings said it would be very interesting if we could learn the identity of the two writers. Well I have written a letter to the paper inviting "Bob Cherry" and "Tom Merry" to write to me. If I get any response I'll let you know next month.

The letter from Bob Cherry in the Post was very interesting, and I am sorry that the old papers are not available today. Besides the "Gem" and "Magnet" there were the "Penny Popular," with the attractions of Jack, Sam and Pete and the dog Rory(?); the "Boys' Friend," with Jimmy Silver and Co.; and the "Nelson Lee," with Nipper and Co. at St. Frank's. I once wrote to Frank Richards at his home in Kent suggesting that these papers could be made available again with modifications to suit the present time, but he thought the price would be 6d. or more to produce today. I cannot see this when you see the rubbish turned out today at 3d. and 4d. each. There was always a moral in Frank Richards's stories not to be found in today's publications.

Sherwood.

TOM MERRY.

...AND BILLY BUNTER?

It is when you are young that books seem most magical. And the most magical of books to me were those now defunct boys' papers, the "Magnet" and the "Gem," in which were related the adventures of Harry Wharton and Co., Tom Merry and Co. - and the everlasting Billy Bunter. I do not think that characters in boys' and girls' books often achieve immortality, but I am sure that Bunter has achieved immortality. As we grow older, we may read much more serious books, or we may spend our time at the dogs; we may even do both. But whatever we do, all who have ever read the Bunter books will remember them, and their author, Frank Richards, with gratitude and affection.

Nottingham.

BOB CHERRY.

"BUNTER DOES HIS BEST"

By ERIC FAYNE

This, in my view, is by far the finest of all the post-war Greyfriars stories. Here we have Frank Richards at his very best, which is saying a great deal. Every one of his stories in recent years has made pleasant reading, and has been a welcome addition to our book-shelves, but, occasionally, the plot has been on the thin side, the story has been rather overburdened with dialogue and slightly irrelevant light episodes, and Carcroft, in which some of us have little interest, has been introduced for no apparent reason. I am, of course, speaking from the adult reader's point of view.

But I do not believe that even the most carping critic will be able to pick a single hole in "BUNTER DOES HIS BEST". A taut and original plot runs throughout the story. Dialogue is neat and clever and never overdone. The main characters are Harry Wharton, who is in one of his obstinate moods, and Vernon-Smith, still rather unscrupulous but a sportsman at heart. Billy Bunter is played in a minor key, and the story loses nothing at all from that. The rivals in sport this time are not Carcroft, but Trumper & Co of Courtfield and Jimmy Silver & Co of Rookwood, and one welcomes these old friends with open arms. The interest never flags from the first page to the last.

I repeat that "BUNTER DOES HIS BEST" is Frank Richards at his best, too. It equals his great masterpieces of any day. It is a school story in a thousand.

In fact, 1954 has been Mr. Richards' year with a vengeance. In the two Annuals just published, every single story is a perfect gem of its type. The two Annuals, plus this latest Bunter, make a perfect trio of volumes to be displayed in the bookshops this approaching Christmas.

* * * * *

THE LONE TEXAN

By ERIC FAYNE

Frank Richards' "LONE TEXAN", published by the Atlantic Book Co. is well worth two shillings of any man's money. A full length story, it unfailingly captures the atmosphere of the Wild West, and it makes very pleasant reading.

"Fresh", the hero, is a jolly and interesting character, even if he has not the charm of the Rio Kid. With an eye, perhaps, to the adult reader, the yarn has a slight romantic and feminine interest. The ending will not satisfy everybody, for Fresh gets less than his just deserts - but life is that way.

The book is of compact and handy size, and printing is clear. The publishers, however, appear to have dispensed with the services of a proof reader. The printing is slipshod and careless, and far too many mistakes are apparent. "The Lone Texan" is a jewel in a slightly dowdy case.

* * * * *

POPULAR PERSONALITIES, No. 7. (Second Series).

By ERIC FAYNE

MARK LINLEY:

It has been well and truly said that the School stories of

Frank Richards are ageless. Stories written as long ago as 1907 come up as fresh today as the new date on the calendar. A well-written story remains a well-written story for ever, and Frank Richards' yarns are as ageless and undated as his world-famous characters. Here and there, it is true, one finds a Greyfriars tale "dated" simply because there is mention of some particular item which is peculiar to some particular period of time. Stories of Diabolists, Nihilists, the Jubilee or the Black-out are obviously dated. Not that the style dates them; it is just the theme that makes them "period" pieces. In such a class I think we may place the theme of the Scholarship Boy.

The stories of the early sufferings of the scholarship lad, Mark Linley, and the snobbery he had to fight against are as dated as a war-time newspaper. Scholarship boys are two a penny these days. Inverted snobbery has taken the place of the old common or garden snobbery. Furthermore, the country's wealth has changed hands.

Some readers, like myself, may have found the early snobbery as portrayed in the Mark Linley stories rather painful. Whether it was over-written, I should not like to say. Personally, I have never encountered such snobbery in school life. Boys always seem to accept one another for what they are and not for what they possess.

Mark Linley has plenty of Lancashire grit; - the "punch of the North" Bob Cherry used to call it. But Mark has always been a rather colourless character. Apart from featuring in tales describing the money troubles of his family, he has seldom played a big part in any of the outstanding powerful series. He does not appear to have had any particular pal, though Bob Cherry has often been described as his best friend at Greyfriars.

In my view, the best Linley series started with "THE MYSTERY OF MARK LINLEY" in 1929. In several excellent tales Mark earned £10 for unfathoming the mysteries of the Inland Revenue for Uncle Clogg, and was suspected of having stolen a £10 note which had been won by Stewart of the Shell in the Popper Prize.

On one occasion, when Wharton was on "THE DOWNWARD PATH", Linley became Head Boy of the Remove for a brief period, and he found the wayward Harry a decided thorn in the flesh.

The substitute writers often made hay of Linley, attempting unsuccessfully to gain sympathy by giving a new slant on the

poverty theme. The shocking "LINLEY MINOR" of the first world-war days, is remembered solely for the ludicrous printer's error which the yarn contained.

To sum up, the plucky Linley has played a worthy part in the Greyfriars Story as a whole, but one has a sneaking feeling that in 1954 the Linleys are doing very nicely, thank you, - while poor old Colonel Wharton, on his estate in Surrey, is probably worried out of his life under a grinding burden of taxation. But that is beside the point, of course.

—c0o—

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 5 - Popular No. 588 (New Series) dated 3/5/30

The Popular consisted almost entirely of reprinted stories. The Rio Kid series, which began in January 1928, was a notable exception to this rule, and another minor exception was the Popolaki Patrol which displaced the Rio Kid for a while in 1930. The Popolaki Patrol was also by Charles Hamilton, and the later stories in the series appeared under his name, the only time his real name was ever seen in the Popular, curiously enough.

There were five members of the Popolaki Patrol who were all boy scouts living on the edge of the East African jungle - Lyn Strong, the leader, little Pip Parker, Fatty Page, Smut the Dutchman, and the immaculate Cecil Stacpoole. With them went their devoted Kikuyu, Bobo, who was a descendant of the lordly Masai. The stories were in a more sombre setting than Charles Hamilton's school stories - or, indeed those of the Rio Kid - and the tone was struck by the very first one in No. 588 which dealt with an encounter with an Arab slave-trader who left one victim to be eaten alive by ants.

The Popular was already shewing signs of decline at this date, the chief of which were the continual alterations made in its composition. Greyfriars was a fairly constant feature, No. 588 containing an instalment of the 1925 Magnet series in which Loder became captain of the school. But the Ferrers Locke story "The Druid's Drum" was not by Charles Hamilton, and neither was the fourth item, a Rockwood story, the first to be featured after a long gap. "Thanks to Tubby" was a very clever imitation, using a Hamiltonian theme (in which the truth about some piece of trickery is written down and sealed in an envelope, to be opened after the event), but it lacked the genuine sparkle of a true Rockwood story.

Finally, on a note of pathos, there was the innovation of a comic supplement.

The Popolaki Patrol was really the only hopeful sign in No. 588, but in fact that Popular now had only a short while to run, and despite many alterations (including the return of the Rio Kid and Frank Richards Schooldays) it was obvious that it could no longer live up to its name. Whether it was an editor's experiments that caused the decline of a paper or, as is usually the case, it was the decline of a paper which caused the editor to experiment, it was only a short time before the Popular was to be replaced by "that spanking weekly treat, the Ranger". No. 588 was the last desperate - and unsuccessful - attempt of the Popular to strike a new note.

* * * * *

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd): 1332. The Greyfriars Hikers; 1333. Down on the Farm; 1334. The Hunted Hikers; 1335. The Spectre of Hoad Castle; 1336. Coker the Hiker; 1337. The Kidnapped Hiker; 1338. The Hiker's Prisoner; 1339. The Bounder's Capture; 1340. The Secret of the Holiday Annual; 1341. The Ace of Jokers; 1342. The Greyfriars Guy; 1343. Down with the Tyrant; 1344. The Greyfriars Strong Man.

AVAILABLE: Magnets, 1918-40, Gems 1917-40, Union Jacks, 1905-30, Nelson Lees 1924-33, Holiday Annuals 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931, Sexton Blake Libs. 2nd and 3rd Series, Modern Boys, Rover, Adventure, Pilot, Robin Hoods (Aldine), Buffalo Bill Lib. (Aldine) 1914-30, Young Britains, Sexton Blake Annuals, Populars 1917-22, Marvels 1916-21, Sibly's Astrology 1796, nearly 1,500 pages. Scores of Plates, £5, 60 Nos. similar items. Collectors Digests, Captains, B.O.P., Black and White, S.O. Libs., Wide Worlds, etc. etc. Satisfaction guaranteed. S.A.E. please. Pre-1935 Sexton Blakes and pre 1918 Nelson Lees required. Good prices paid.

RONALD ROUSE, 3 ST. LEONARDS TERRACE, GAS-MILL, NORWICH.

PRIVATE COLLECTOR WANTS: Magnets and S.O.Ls. Greyfriars and Rookwood. Some for sale or exchange.

65, BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR C.D. ANNUAL YET?

GOSSIP ABOUTST. FRANK'S

b y

JACK WOOD,
Nostaw,
328, Stockton Lane,
Y O R K.

*
*
*

Now, at last, we are beginning to get into the real St. Frank's district. Since we left the thriving town of Helmford, we have travelled by way of Midshott and Little Hadlow to the expanding market town of BANNINGTON, which is situated about three miles to the east of St. Frank's and frequently visited by the boys on account of its being a good shopping centre, having an excellent picture house (of which more later) and possessing several schools which are on the college sporting calendar.

Bannington, with its history stretching back to the early days of the south Saxons and covering, among other moments, a Royalist adherence during the Civil War, is a typical Sussex market town of more than ordinary importance. It is, we are told, the seat of a bishop; it possesses a mayor and corporation; it is also a notable sporting centre with its racecourse, which we passed on the outskirts as we came in from Helmford past the Grammar School, its Stronghold, home of the famous Blue Crusaders, and its speedway.

In 1922, we are told, the population - presumably on the 1921 census - was 5,000, but in 1924 it is clear that post war developments are beginning to be felt and that industry is, at the lower end of the town, rearing its head and changing the whole character of a picturesque Sussex beauty spot. Then, we read, "Bannington was a curious mixture of a town. It was old-fashioned and new-fashioned at one and the same time. One of the most picturesque old towns of Sussex, Bannington had traditions of age-old customs

which were like unwritten laws.

"The High Street, for example, was typical of the whole town. Down in the narrow section, where the main road for London branched off, there was always a brisk and unseemly bustle. Traffic was fairly congested, what with private cars, motor buses and various other vehicles. The pavements, too, were narrow, and people jostled one another as they went about their business. Here, in this plebeian quarter, such establishments as Lipton's the Home and Colonial Stores, the Maypole Dairy, the International Stores, etc., were to be found almost rubbing shoulders. Here and there were dazzling jewellery shops, and still more dazzling tailors' premises, with names over their portals reminiscent of the Old Testament.

"In fact, the narrow portion of Bannington High Street was the place where all the shopping was done - where the proletariat mingled cheerfully with the bourgeoisie, and the shopkeepers smiled upon all alike. On Saturday nights this part of the town was crowded.

"But higher up the High Street, where the road broadened out majestically into something approaching real impressiveness, there was a totally different atmosphere. Here the pavements were wide, and the shops were select, refined establishments where such merchandise as exquisite gowns, millinery, etc., were to be found. One great shop displayed the latest things in motor cars, another, just as imposing, gave the Bannington folk a glimpse of Saville Row's latest creations in gentlemen's wear. Here Archie Glenthorne had been known to linger for hours at a stretch.

"And, right in the very centre of Fashionable Bannington, so to speak, the ultra-select Japanese Cafe was situated. Across the wide street the imposing front, with marble pillars and gilded domes of the Bannington Palladium - The Home of the World's Finest Screen Classics - raised its minarets towards the sky. The Japanese Cafe prided itself upon its exclusiveness. It was the Mecca of Bannington's idle rich. The prices on the menu cards indicated this. The place was patronised by all the best families of the district. And, after all, there were some fine residential sections round the outskirts of the town. Bannington was a fairly important centre, and lots of rich people lived there.

"Now and again parties of St. Frank's fellows would drop into the Japanese Cafe, just for a cup of tea before going to the pictures. It sounded well to carelessly remark that they'd had a

high old time at the Japanese Cafe. The St. Frank's patrons were mostly sedate seniors. For a swarming mob of juniors to invade the place was unprecedented."

Thus Edwy Searles Brooks in Pots of Money, Boys' Friend Library 1st Series No. 704. In later years the Japanese Cafe became less exclusive and the juniors often called there after a football or cricket match or a cheery cycle ride through the leafy lanes, or before going to the pictures.

At this upper end of the town, too, is the police station, across the road from the Japanese Cafe and residence of the one and only Insp. Jameson, a stolid, rather unimaginative individual who liked the limelight, but often found that obscurity would have been preferable. More of him, however, at some future date.

Nearby, and further up, the High Street accommodates the town's imposing war memorial. Car parks are close at hand and, just off the memorial square, are some pleasant rest gardens. Opposite is the Wheatsheaf, a former coaching inn which is now one of the town's less savoury hostels.

Also in the square is the Old Town Hall which houses the local government offices, and the council chamber where the council sits at 5.30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month. In the Town Hall, too, the court sits on Thursdays, while the building, gift to the town of Colonel Glenthorne, Archie's father, is also used for lectures and other social events.

Moving back down the High Street again, we pass the Post Office; the Palladium, built by a local firm for Solomon Levi and the St. Frank's Remove "shareholders" when the old cinema in a back street put on shows which were a disgrace; the Victoria Hall, centre for social events; and one of Bannington's 25-strong police force on point duty.

We pass, too, the road leading past the Grapes Hotel (Bann. 688), one of the town's best, and the Station Hotel to the wide, open yard of the railway station. We come by degrees, then, to the lower end of the High Street where there is the Palace, a low-type music hall, and Bob Norman's none-too-savoury boxing booth. Then we have the gas works and other industrial sites, and the speedway, former greyhound racing, track not far from The Stronghold, now the home of First Division Blue Crusaders and one-time headquarters of Third Division (South) Bannington Town.

Bannington, early closing day Wednesday and market day

Saturday, holds an annual fair, fête and flower show which is the most important occasion of the year. This is the occasion when the Bannington cricket club meets the Eastshire county side - the game which introduced Jerry Dodd to big-time cricket - and no doubt the town's Brass Band contributes to the day's entertainment. The fairground is not far from the ruined 14th century Bannington Abbey, now doubtless scheduled as an ancient monument, and for the modest sum of sixpence entrance may be obtained to the ruins and the underground passages. One of these leads off to a former cell near the river, and in the peaceful riverside setting in which so many of our abbeys were so beautifully set, it is possible to gaze across the fields to the nearby locks and water mills. As the chimes come echoing from the clock in the low-steepled St. Andrew's Church in the town, the atmosphere is of peace and tranquillity.

Bannington, of course, has many notable buildings. In addition to the boys' Grammar School there are the High School for Girls, with its grass tennis courts; the Council School, of which Jim Blundle, Tom Kitchen and Bill Ringham, all errand boys and Scouts, are the leading lights; the Station Hotel livery stable owned by Josiah Biggin; Bannington Manor, home of Lord and Lady Banningstowe; Glenthorne Manor, home of the Glenthornes; an asylum; Kingstown prison; the Cottage Hospital; Marshall Rd. Council School; a riding school; a broadcasting station; chemical works and factories; a T.A. unit quartered on Bannington Moor; public library; London and Home Counties Bank; water-works; and various public houses including, in addition to those already named, The Cups, The Blue Dragon, The White Lion, The Foaming Bowl, The King's Arms, (in which Nipper once had a stirring adventure which led to misunderstandings and his displacement from the junior captaincy) and the Fox and Hounds.

There is much still to be said of Bannington and its personalities, but I think I'll reserve that for another article in two months' time. Next month James Cook tells us something about one of those "single" stories and Charles Churchill reminds us of one of Brooks's leading characters! So until then, cheerio everyone.

* * * * *

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION: After Woodingdean, back to Cherry Place for the October meeting with some of the happy wanderers in attendance. Included amongst these were Alan Stewart from Jersey and David Harrison back from his King Cricket triumphs on the various Big Sides. Also another nomad was Bill Jardine, up from Sussex and with the regulars in attendance another Brotherhood of the Happy Hours meeting was engaged.

The two librarians gave satisfactory reports as per loans and disposal of surplus copies.

Impromptu talk was given by Eileen Whiter and although short and concise this was thoroughly enjoyed. Eileen's feed was also thoroughly enjoyed and she was ably assisted in serving this by sister Kathleen.

Charlie Wright, as winner of quiz at last meeting, conducted his own effort as per custom. This time Uncle Benjamin was in sparkling form and was an easy winner. For second place there was a triple dead heat, Roger Jenkins, Bob Blythe and Josie Packman being the three next best.

Roger conducted three rounds of his study game and Alan Stewart was top of the form. Josie Packman was second and David Harrison third.

An invitation to hold the April spring meeting at Woodingdean was gratefully accepted and the best thanks were afforded to Bill Jardine for his very kind offer.

All the "Owns" and "Billy Bunter Does His Best" that were ordered have been distributed and dispatched. A few copies remain for disposal, kindly inform the undersigned if you require any.

Next meeting at 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich on Sunday, November 21st.

Thus another happy milestone has been passed and the meeting terminated with the usual good thanks to the hosts.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

* * * * *

NORTHERN SECTION, Meeting, 9th October, 1954: We were pleased to see Stanley Smith who had travelled all the way from Usk, Mon., once again. He told us he hopes to be with us quite frequently in the future.

A discussion arose relative to the tea on the occasion of the Christmas Party. Secretary Norman Smith, explained that last year the arrangements fell, unavoidably, on just one or two lady members and it was too much for them. An alternative was to have tea laid on at a restaurant and then come on to Hyde Park Road for the party. The feeling of the members present was in favour of this idea, and it will be further discussed next month. It will be of great help if all members who can attend the party, and we would like as many as ever possible, will notify the Secretary in good time.

J. Breeze Bentley continued the reading of "A Very Gallant Gentleman". The dramatic and pathetic closing chapters, were listened to with rapt attention.

Next month our chairman will be reading his "Bob Cherry's Romance". I have had the privilege of seeing this already, for it is going into the Annual. Those who attend next month are in for a treat and, of course, all readers of the Annual.

Next meeting, November 13th.

H. LECKENBY,

Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING - 18th OCT: There was quite a goodly muster of the clan this evening. We were very pleased to see Tom and Jack from Cradley and Miss Russell again after an interval of two months or so, and also Mrs. Davey after a longer interval.

There was quite a varied and interesting programme and after the minutes and references to the Christmas Party, we heard two chapters, read by Tom Porter, of a story about Mark Linely fallen on hard times, trying for a Founders Scholarship.

It was nice to hear a reading from Tom again, but the writer was much interested to notice the completely different style and atmosphere, (reminiscent of "Eric"), of this early "Magnet" story from the later ones. The Bounder was then a most unpleasant character, very different from the much more likeable Smithy so familiar in the later stories.

We then had a discussion on the reasons for introducing foreigners into Frank Richards' stories. It was noticed that many of these dropped out in the later "Magnets" whilst others like 'Inky' and 'Fishy' remained as essential ingredients.

And so to refreshments and a quiz. Messrs. Ingram and Porter tied for first place and finally settled the matter by each asking

the other a question when Tom proved the winner. In accordance with our recently adopted custom no prize was offered.

We then came to raffle a 1924 Holiday Annual. By now the evening was well advanced, but before commencing our final 'get together' our Chairman referred to a letter he had received and finally the writer read some notes describing a real life Mr. Quelch, actually a railway chairman who like the Remove. "Beak" was stern and even terrifying yet just and upright.

And so home to bed after a very full and interesting evening.

EDWARD DAVEY.

* * * * *

MERSEYSIDE SECTION, Oct. 1954: There was an excellent attendance at this, our annual meeting, ample evidence that interest in the hobby has not diminished in the slightest. In order that the main part of the evening be devoted to entertainment, business was kept to the minimum; this included the minutes, financial report, election of officers, and chairman's general remarks. Don Webster & Co. were re-elected en bloc, and Sir Frederick Bowman, than whom we have no more staunch and enthusiastic colleague, was elected vice-president. The Chairman was pleased to report that the club is making progress in every way, and he also mentioned as typical of the club spirit the gift of one pound towards book purchase by one of our members who wishes to remain anonymous - a most useful appreciated contribution.

We then sat down to a regal spread prepared by Mrs. Webster, and for the next half-hour our mouths were otherwise occupied than in the usual chatter, and, the inner man well fortified, we were ready for action, which took the form of a game submitted by Frank Unwin. This provided excellent fun, not to mention brain-wracking, and the winning group well deserved their success against strong opposition.

We then held a beetle drive, at Master Peter's suggestion, and this was quite a nice change from the usual hobby stuff. Mrs. Webster, displaying remarkable dexterity with the dice, coupled with an equally remarkable knowledge of the anatomy of the order Coleoptera, was an easy winner, putting the male members to shame; we must really find out how many legs beetles possess. Thank goodness, it was not a centipede drive!

The evening ended with the usual reluctant farewells, and we departed homeward, more than satisfied with our evening at

Waterloo House.

Next meeting, 14th Nov. 7 p.m.

F. CASE.

Secretary.

AVAILABLE: Bound volumes and long runs. Magnet, Gem 1930-1940 Gem 1-26. Boys Realms (O.S.) From No. 1. Puck about 1910. Champion. Young Britain. Aldine Half-Holiday. British Boys. Boys Herald. Boys of England. Boys Journal. Bretts. Hogarth Items (coloured covers). Schoolgirls Own (H. Richards). All types S.O.Ls. WANTED: (1900-1930). PRICES OFFERED: Picturegoer (3/- each). Motor, Ring (1/6 each). Motor Cycle, Aeroplane (1/-). London Life. Movie Humour. similar 1930-1940 (3/- each). Ladies Fashion. Stage. Music Hall magazines. (1890-1914) 1/6 each. New Fun, Bits of Fun (1910-1920) 2/- each. Topical Times. All Sports. Boxing. Football Favourite. Similar pre-1940 50/- hundred. ALSO WANTED: Most types Old Boys Books 1900-1930 (YOUR PRICE USUALLY O.K.). SATISFACTION OR FULL REFUND. EXCHANGES? S.A.E. PLEASE

T. LAMBERT,

347 GERTRUDE ROAD,

NORWICH.

POST BAG

FRANK RICHARDS WELCOME LETTER

Rose Lawn,
Kingsgate-on-Sea,
Broadstairs, Kent.

October 11th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. I found Page 271 very interesting. I was first apprised of the high honour that had come Bunter's way, by a telephone-call from a newspaper at Newcastle: up to then sad to say, I had quite missed the proceedings of the British Association. Well, if the "future be to the fat", as some of these learn-gentlemen opine, Billy Bunter will be compensated some day for all his trials and tribulations in the Greyfriars Remove!

I like very much Gerry Allison's review of the two annuals. One of the best things about them, I think, is that BBO. is down to 8/6d. We hope to follow suit with T.M.O. next time. An agreeable item of news lately is that the reprints of the "Tom Merry" books will be at 2/6d. In the matter of the prices of books, I think we are all glad to see things on the downward path!

With kindest regards,

Very sincerely, FRANK RICHARDS.

TO THE DEFENCE OF GREYFRIARS

28, Derwent St., Newcastle-on-Tyne, 5. 10/10/54.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I feel I must launch a strong protest against James Cook's sweeping remarks on the merits of St. Franks and the Hamilton schools.

I think Mr. Cook's biggest blunder was in saying that it was unwise to associate oneself with any of the Hamilton characters. Why I can think of several admirable Greyfriars characters which any boy today would be the better for taking as an ideal. Flashing across my mind come such fine characters as Harry Wharton, Mark Linley, Dick Penfold, Tom Redwing, Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, Hobson and Wingate. I always felt that the St. Franks schoolboys were more like caricatures than characters.

Also Mr. Cook's further remarks on Nipper being a scheming tactician, who uses polemics as fine as a Filibuster, and proves black is white. Is this the type of fellow he wishes one to imitate?

Surely it would be better to model oneself on the Greyfriars fellows with their much higher moral tone.

I am afraid that in my eyes Nipper will never be in the same class as Harry Wharton, for you see, he lacks breeding and the noble character, which Wharton with all his faults undoubtedly possess.

Hoping you are keeping well Herbert, and going strong with the jolly old Annual.

Kindest regards,
BASIL ADAM.

* * * * *

AND MORE DISAGREEMENT

24, English Street, LONGTOWN,
Cumberland. October 14th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I envy you your recent holiday in London and your "cracks" with the old boys. But who knows??? Perhaps you and I will meet one day, and then we will "crack".

I disagree with Anthony P. Baker when, in his October C.D. article, THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE MAGNET, he says: "Moreover, unlike R.J. Macdonald, Mr. Chapman has succeeded in giving each individual in the leading groups a face of his own. I can picture

quite clearly in my mind the face of each member of the Famous Five, while the Terrible Three and Blake and Co. are much less distinct." What about the smiling Tom Merry, the handsome Talbot, the aristocratic Arthur Augustus, the burly Jack Blake, the lanky Figgins, the bullying Gore, the pugnacious George Alfred Grundy, the brainy Skimpole, the cheeky Wally D'Arcy, the manly Kildare, the genial Mr. Railton, the sour Mr. Ratcliffe and the crusty Taggles? The faces of all these GEM characters have remained clearly in my mind for forty years, thanks to that grand artist, R.J. Macdonald.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT FARISH.

A CURIOSITY

In 1919 the old established firm of James Henderson & Son started the 3d Nugget Library. Some of the stories at least were reprints of those in the pre-1914 penny library and the same name. The 3d's however were good value for usually there were two long stories. Among them were the old Peter Flints. No. 12 for instance contained "The Masked Tawareks" and "The Plague of Spiders", and No. 8 "The Skeleton Gang" and "The Human Idol".

Now here comes the curiosity - round about No. 24 this 'Nugget Library' was taken over by the Amalgamated Press for their imprint appeared at the bottom of the last page and also on the back cover. Yet on the inside of the front cover James Henderson's imprint also appeared and their name in tiny type on the front cover itself. The adverts, too, concerned Henderson's well-known comics and 'Young Folks Tales'.

This number had a very long complete story "The Panic Plunderers", a story of Gripton Court, Detective. In addition there was a short complete "The Green Emerald", a tale of Sexton Blake.

That must be the only occasion when a Blake story was associated with any other imprint than that of the A.P., even in part. - H.L.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR 'ANNUAL' YET?